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ABSTRACT

The relationship between self-awareness and counseling outcome has received little attention in the counseling research literature. In order to test the relationship between counselor-induced and dispositional self-awareness and counseling outcomes, 60 female undergraduates participated in two audiotaped sessions. In the sign-up session subjects' sociability behaviors were rated as they interacted with a confederate. In the quasi-counseling interview subjects discussed real concerns with a counselor who either reflected their thoughts and feelings (mirroring) or encouraged them to talk (non-mirroring). Subjects then completed a sociability self-rating form for the veridicality measure, a sentence completion form to measure self-awareness (Exner, 1973, and the short version of the Counselor Rating Form. Analysis of results showed that those high in dispositional private self-awareness were more self-referent and veridical, and that those in the mirroring condition were more veridical than those in the non-mirroring condition. There was no support for the hypothesized interaction between dispositional and induced self-awareness. The findings suggest that prior knowledge about the level of clients' private self-awareness might be important in assessment and treatment planning. (MCF)

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Self-Awareness in a Quasi-Counseling Interview

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Self-Awareness in a Quasi-Counseling Interview

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to test relationships between counselor-induced and dispositional self-awareness and several counseling process and outcome variables in a quasi-counseling interview. Hypotheses were tested using 60 female undergraduate students in a 2 x 2 multivariate analysis of covariance design. It was found that those high in dispositional private self-awareness were more self-referent and veridical than those low in dispositional private self-awareness. Persons who were in the mirroring interview condition were more veridical than those in the non-mirroring condition. No support was found for the hypothesized interaction between dispositional and induced self-awareness.

Self-Awareness in a Quasi-Counseling Interview

The purpose of this research is to test the effects of "self-awareness" in a quasi-counseling interview Self-awareness is defined as attention paid to one's own thoughts, images, bodily sensations, feelings and behaviors. Based on the work of Rogers (1942, 1951, 1961) and other counseling theorists, it seems that this factor should play an important role in determining the outcome of counseling. Inferentially, from theories of counseling, it would appear that persons who attend to their own thoughts, feelings and behaviors should be better counseling candidates than those persons who are not as self aware, as a result of their higher levels of self-insight and understanding. However, in spite of the appeal of this notion, the relationship between self-awareness and counseling outcome has received little attention in the counseling research literature. Thus, while most theories of counseling and psychotherapy stress the importance of client self-awareness to therapeutic outcome, few have empirically tested the relationship between these two factors.

In response to Rogers' client-centered approach to counseling there have been empirical investigations into the effects of specific types of counselor verbal responses on self-focused behavior in quasi-counseling encounters (Merbaum, 1961; Merbaum & Southwell, 1965; Kennedy & Zimmer, 1968; Ehrlich, D'Augelli & Danish, 1979). The results of this research suggest that counselor reflection of feeling and restatement of content produce an increase in the use of self-referent client

pronouns.

Social psychologists have also been engaged in the study of self-awareness and at least ten years of social psychological theories and research have been generated to study this concept (e.g., Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Fenigstein, Scheier & Buss, 1975; Buss, 1980; Carver & Scheier, 1981). It has been found that those who are made to feel self-aware use more self-referent pronouns than those who are not self-aware (Carver & Scheier, 1978; Davis & Brock, 1975; Geller & Shaver, 1976). Self-aware persons are also more accurate in reporting their behaviors than those persons who are not induced to higher levels of self-awareness (Pryor, Gibbons, Wicklund, Fazio & Hood, 1977; Scheier, Buss & Buss, 1978). These findings have implications for counseling and therefore for the present study, since they demonstrate that self-focus and congruence of self-report can be manipulated in a controlled experimental setting.

Another contribution of social psychological theories of self-awareness has come from Fenigstein et al. (1975). These researchers have developed the concept of dispositional self-awareness, which they define as an individual's tendency to be characteristically self-aware of inner thoughts, feelings and prior behaviors. Fenigstein and his colleagues refer to this tendency, or trait, as "self-consciousness" to distinguish it from the induced state of self-awareness. Further, they predict that induced and dispositional self-awareness will have similar behavioral consequences (i.e., increased self-focus and congruence). To measure dispositional self-awareness Fenigstein et al. (1975) have constructed and validated the

Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS). Damsteegt and Christoffersen (1982) have found a significant interaction between ccunselor-induced self-awareness and dispositional self-awareness, as measured by the SCS. Their study indicated that those with high levels of dispositional private self-awareness who received self-focused counseling became more self-aware than those who were not high in dispositional private self-awareness.

In the present study, the above theories and research are used as a basis for answering the following research questions: (1) To what degree will certain counselor verbal responses (i.e., reflection vs. minimal encouragement) relate to self-focused subject behaviors and self-report accuracy in a quasi-counseling interview? (2) To what degree will dispositional self-awareness (as measured by the SCS) relate to the same self-focus and self-report subject behaviors? and (3) To what degree will dispositional self-awareness interact with counselor-induced self-awareness on the above dependent variables?

Method

Subjects and Design

Participants were 60 female undergraduate students at the State University of New York at Albany (SUNYA) who volunteered for this study.

The hypotheses of the present research were tested in a quasi-counseling interview using a 2 x 2 multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) design in which the independent

variables were: (1) counselor mirroring (reflection of feeling and restatement of content) vs. non-mirroring verbal responses (minimal encouragers) and; (2) high vs. low levels of dispositional private self-awareness. The three dependent variables were: (1) number of subjects' self-referent pronouns emitted during a quasi-counseling interview; (2) self-focused responses to a variety of content areas, presented to subjects on a sentence completion form (Exner, 1973), and; (3) veridicality, or accuracy, of self-reported sociability. The covariate was subjects' impressions of the counselor as measured by the short version of the Counselor Rating Form (CRF-S; Corrigan & Schmidt, 1983), a validated standardized rating form.

Procedure

Each subject participated in two distinct parts of the present study: a sign-up session and a quasi-counseling interview. The primary purpose of the sign-up session was to observe and rate the subject's "sociability" behaviors as they interacted with a confederate. In the quasi-counseling interview subjects discussed real career concerns with a counselor who either reflected their thoughts and feelings, or she simply encouraged them to talk. Both of these sessions are described below.

Sign-up session. Volunteers were asked to sign-up at a designated meeting place where they were unobtrusively observed while interacting with a confederate. From this interaction an observer, hidden behind a two-way mirror, rated the subject according to her "sociability" behaviors (greeting, initiation of conversation, smiling, nodding and so forth).

Quasi-counseling interview. In the quasi-counseling interview, subjects played the role of clients in a ten-minute simulated vocational counseling session. As subjects arrived at the interview they were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions.

A list of career-related issues was provided to subjects to facilitate discussion and to control for differences in the content of sessions between subjects. Subjects discussed the issues of greatest concern to them. The counselor either responded to the subject with reflection and restatement in the mirroring condition or with minimal encouragement (i.e., "yes," "uh hmm," "I see") in the non-mirroring condition. Upon completion of the dialogue subjects completed the "sociability" self-rating for the veridicality measure, the Exner (1973) self-focus scale and the CRF-S.

Results

Validation of the counseling manipulation

The experimental conditions were audio-tape recorded and analyzed for the degree to which the counselor's responses agreed with the scripted responses for the two catagories of mirroring and non-mirroring. The resulting Kappa coefficient, .836, suggested that the counselor presented the two conditions as intended.

Tests of hypotheses

The entire SCS (26 items) was administered and the ten items of the private subscale were scored in order to define the high and low groups on the dispositional private self-awareness

variable. The median score (Mdn=25.9; N=60) was used to divide these two groups in the present study.

Regarding results of the MANCOVA, significant Lambda values were found for the main effects of both independent variables: dispositional private self-awareness ($F(3,53)=6.19$; $p=.001$) and counselor verbal response ($F(3,53)=2.83$; $p=.047$). The interaction between the two independent variables was not significant ($F(3,53)=1.87$; $p=.147$).

Univariate ANCOVAs were computed for the three dependent variables on the two significant main effects. Dispositional private self-awareness was found to have significant effects on each of the three dependent variables. Subjects who were in the high dispositional private self-awareness group used significantly more ($F(1,55)=15.18$; $p = .001$) self-referent pronouns ($M=118.24$; $SD=21.65$) in the quasi-counseling interview than those who were in the low group ($M=93.16$; $SD=26.92$). Subjects who were in the high dispositional private self-awareness group were significantly more ($F(1,55)=7.02$; $p=.011$) self-focused in their responses on the Exner scale ($M=65.99$; $SD=11.19$) than those in the low group ($M=57.85$; $SD=12.23$). And finally, subjects who were in the high dispositional private self-awareness group were significantly more ($F(1,55)=6.92$; $p=.011$) veridical on a measure of self-reported sociability ($M=13.69$; $SD=3.37$) than those in the low group ($M=11.03$; $SD=4.25$).

The results of the ANCOVA for counselor verbal response showed a significant effect ($F(1,55)=7.52$; $p=.008$) only for the dependent variable of veridicality. The group receiving

mirroring responses (reflection and restatement) were more veridical (M=14.30; SD=3.37) on the measure of self-reported sociability than those in the non-mirroring (minimal encouragement) condition (M=10.90; SD=4.17). The effects of counselor verbal response on the remaining two dependent variables were nonsignificant.

Discussion

The findings of the present study are potentially useful in counseling because they examine a validated construct, dispositional private self-awareness, for predicting self-focused behaviors and self-report veridicality in counseling. Specifically, the results suggest that heightened levels of dispositional private self-awareness are predictive of heightened self-referent and veridical behaviors in the counseling interview. In practice, prior knowledge about levels of client private self-awareness might be important for assessment and treatment-planning. For example, it might be important to increase self-awareness in clients who are low in dispositional private self-awareness, prior to conducting an assessment in order to heighten self-report veridicality. Therapeutic techniques which focus attention on multiple facets of the self (i.e., overt behaviors, belief systems and feelings) may be more effective than unidimensional approaches for raising self-awareness in these people.

Fenigstein et al. (1975) raise an issue, regarding dispositional private self-awareness, which may have implications for counseling. They predict that those who are

moderately self-aware will benefit most from therapy, while those who are at the low and high extremes will be poor psychotherapy candidates. In contrast, the present results suggest that those high in dispositional private self-awareness will be more self-focused and veridical than those who are low in dispositional private self-awareness in a quasi-counseling interview. To the extent that self-focus and veridicality mediate behavioral change, these results do not support the claim of Fenigstein et al. (1975), that clients who are high in dispositional private self-awareness will be "poor psychotherapy candidates." This issue certainly merits further investigation.

In the present study, it was found that both mirroring counselor verbal responses and dispositional private self-awareness were predictive of heightened levels of veridicality. In previous social psychological self-awareness research (e.g., Pryor et al, 1977), induced and dispositional private self-awareness were found to be related to self-report veridicality. Together, these findings provide strong evidence for inferring that private self-awareness is related to veridicality, both in general and in the counseling context. In future counseling research and practice, Rogers' (1961) concept of congruence may best be understood in the context of private self-awareness. That is, clinical and research efforts to study or impact veridicality might be most effective when levels of induced and dispositional private self-awareness are understood and controlled.

The effect of counselor verbal responses on self-focused responses to the Exner scale was nonsignificant. This

association had not been studied prior to the present research and therefore little was known about the relationship between these two variables. In the present study, the effect for this relationship barely fell short of significance ($F=(1,55)=3.87$; $p = .054$). Thus, a type II error may have been responsible for this nonsignificant finding. Clearly, there was a "medium" effect size ($f=.27$; Cohen, 1977) for this relationship.

In conclusion, it is recommended that further efforts be directed at studying important counseling process and outcome variables as they are related to induced and dispositional self-awareness. For example, Buss (1980) concludes from a review of the research that there are relationships between self-awareness and variables such as self-esteem and social anxiety. These and other self-awareness relationships may have important implications for counseling research and practice.

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